

Helpless

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Category: Once Upon a Time

Genre: Drama, Romance

Language: English

Characters: Belle/Lacey, Rumpelstiltskin/Mr. Gold

Status: Completed

Published: 2016-04-14 00:47:22

Updated: 2016-04-14 00:47:22

Packaged: 2016-04-27 18:28:59

Rating: T

Chapters: 1

Words: 2,595

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: The friendship between the librarian and landlord is tested when they run against each other in Storybrooke's mayoral election. Modern day Hamilton AU.

Helpless

How does a bastard, orphan, son of a whore and a Scotsman win an election against an Australian? Alexander Gold scowled as he pinned his campaign poster on the corkboard in Granny's diner. She almost didn't let him at first, but then he offered to give her a discount on her rent for the next week. Belle French squeezed in next to him, pinning her own poster to the board.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Gold." She mumbled as she stapled the top corners of her poster.

He smirked. "Hello, Miss French. Still haven't dropped out yet, I see."

"Why would I do that?" She turned to face him, her lacy blue dress swishing as she moved. "Everyone knows I'm going to win."

"We shall see." He limped away and out the door.

The few people dining outside in the chilly late Autumn air became interested in the lasagna on their plates as he walked by. That was one thing Belle French didn't have that he did: the fear of the people. She would never use scare tactics to win an election, but as the voting day grew nearer his plans grew darker.

As Mayor Mills' second term came to a close, she lost popularity. If Mr. Gold had despised anyone since the beginning, it would be Regina Mills. So he decided to run against her in the next election. Shortly after his announcement, she dropped out of the running. The next day, the Storybrooke Mirror ran an article quoting Regina on her support

of democratic candidate Belle French.

He'd stormed into the library, the newspaper scrunched under his arm. He'd only stepped foot in the library a few times before, mostly to try to flirt with her, and like always he found her seated at the circulation desk. "What is this?"

Belle looked up from the notebook she'd been writing in. "I'm running against you."

He stared at her. "I-" _I've always considered you a friend_, he wanted to say, but she probably didn't feel the same way. Just because she didn't shake with fear when she saw him coming didn't mean they were friends. Sitting together at Granny's a few times didn't count for anything. "I'll pay you to drop out."

She crossed her arms. "I'm not doing this for money."
>He pulled the newspaper from under his arm, squinting at Sidney's article. "It says here that you want to focus the town's budget on updating Storybrooke's outdated technology." He glanced up to see her narrow her eyes at him. "Like that clunky computer that won't turn on." He pointed to the computer on her desk covered in a thin sheet of dust.<p>

"If you think you can buy my name off the ballot you underestimate my dedication to this town."

He almost questioned why she felt dedicated to the town. They did nothing for her yet she still did her best to help them. But if she wanted to run for mayor, he wouldn't stop her. So he left the library and continued running against her, even though he knew that election would damage any chance at a true friendship he had with the librarian.

Belle watched as Mr. Gold limped out the front door of Granny's. Things used to be less tense between them, but ever since she announced that she planned to run against him, he could barely look at her without scowling. Belle finished stapling her poster to the board, turning to sit at the counter. Ruby swung around the corner, a paper coffee cup in one hand and her apron in the other. She dropped the apron on the counter and shoved the coffee cup in Belle's hand. "You ready?"

Belle nodded, sniffing the mug to make sure it was tea. "Yep."

After much research, Belle decided a door-to-door campaign would be most effective. She'd gotten through the majority of the residents in Storybrooke but she still had to go to the West side. It was time consuming, but she was willing to wait for it to bring results.

Ruby parked on the end of a street and Belle walked to each household, giving her small spiel and answering any questions the person who answered the door had. Most people promised to vote for her, though she did have a few stuffy older guys sniff and say they'd rather vote for Gold. As she walked back to Ruby's car, she saw Gold in front of his pink house getting the mail. She'd avoided going to his house earlier for obvious reasons but as she passed him she smiled and waved. He fumbled with the mail in his hand, adjusting the position of his cane with the other. He smiled a wobbly smile and walked back up the driveway.

Once Belle was past him she cursed herself for being so friendly for him. They weren't supposed to be friendly; they were supposed to be against each other. She climbed into Ruby's car, pulling her heels off as soon as she sat down. It wasn't exactly practical to walk around town in six inch heels but she'd rather not have voters looking down at her like she was a child.

"What an asshole," Ruby commented as she pulled away from the curb. "I can't believe he wears his suits when he's at home."

"He looks good in suits," Belle said, thinking more about changing into something comfortable when she got home than what she was saying.

Ruby gasped. "What do you mean?"
>"I just mean suits look good on him. They make him look...sophisticated, you know?"<p>

"Belle," Ruby smirked. "Don't go sleeping with the enemy."

Belle put her hands to her chest in mock-offense. "No worries. He's a Republican."

When Ruby dropped Belle off at the library, she climbed the steps to her apartment with her shoes in hand. She fell asleep before she could take off her dress, and she only woke up to eat dinner. The next morning she rose early and threw on a simple dress, dashing down the stairs just in time for the clock to strike nine.

As she went to flip the sign in the window to say _open_, Ruby burst through the door. "Have you ready this?!" She flung the newspaper at Belle, who fumbled with the pages sliding around.

Belle squinted at the first article, seeing her name.

She wasn't skimming for long when her knuckles turned white and she muttered, "That bastard." He'd called her everything under the sun it seemed. He called her careless and irresponsible and unfit and with each line her eyes ran over she hated him more and more. Without a second thought she pulled open the door.
>"What are you gonna do?" Ruby asked.<p>

"I'm going to have a little chat with Sidney." Before Ruby could stop her and make her think it through, Belle stalked away.

In the back of his shop, Gold leafed through the day's newspaper, scanning to find estate sales in the area. It had been a day since Sidney ran the article with what he said about Belle, and yet he hadn't heard from her. She was never one to head into something without thinking, but she was brave. He was almost disappointed she hadn't shown up with clenched fists yesterday.

He heard the bell attached to the front door ring and he placed the newspaper back on his worktable, grabbing his cane to go deal with the customer. Before he could move the curtain separating the back of his shop from the front, it fluttered and Belle French herself rushed in.

"Normally I don't allow customers back here, dearie." He commented as

she marched over to stand at his worktable.

"Oh shut up," she groaned. "Why did you say those things? You ruined everything."

He limped over to her as quickly as he could, clenching his jaw to keep his face from betraying the pain he felt. "I said those things because I have an election to win."

She frowned at the newspaper on the table. "You didn't need to say those things to win."

"I'm running for mayor, Ms. French, not fifth grade class president."

"God!" She snapped her head back up, her blue eyes defiantly meeting his. "Why are you being such a jerk?"

>He took a step forward, his voice raising. "Why did you run against me?"<p>

"You don't even like this town! Why would you run in the first place?"

"I'm trying to fix this town after what Regina did to it."

She laughed bitterly. "I'd like to see you try."

"I know you hate me, Ms. French, but--"

She launched herself at him, her lips meeting his in a messy kiss. His hands instinctively went to her hips but he pulled back. Shaking his head, he wondered how he could ever say no to more of this. "What--"

"Talk less," she smiled, running her fingers through his hair and pulling him down for another hungry kiss. For years he'd wondered what she would taste like, but he never thought she would so much as touch his hand. Had she felt this way all along or were these feelings new? Did it matter? She'd kissed him! His lips moved against hers as she backed up against his desk. He broke the kiss for a moment, shoving the newspaper off the table. Her name caught his eye on one of the pages, though.

>It was this morning's paper. In the politics section she'd been interviewed.<p>

She twisted around. "What are you looking at?" When she saw the page he held in his hand, she let out a small breath. "Oh."

"So this is what you think?" He stepped back, holding the article closer to his face to read through it. "I'm not good enough for this town?"

Her fingers slid over his hand, trying to get him to put the paper down. "I didn't--"

"Shut up!" He slammed the paper on the table. "Shut the hell up! Did you think you could trick me? Make me weak? Tell the whole town how bad I am and then kiss me as part of some silly strategy? Get out."

Belle opened her mouth to say something, then closed it, crossing her arms. "Good luck tomorrow." She muttered, always the polite model citizen.

He watched as she carried herself out of his shop faster than those heels should have allowed her to move. He ran his hands over his face. Belle- his first friend, his enemy. He smashed his cane over the clock he'd been attempting to repair. How could he let himself believe even for a moment that she would be interested in him? She was just using him, though. A kind heart like hers knew a vile heart like his when it saw one. He threw away his chance with her before he even got it.

Belle woke up late the next morning. She supposed she should leave her apartment and go into town- it was Election Day, after all, but she couldn't bring herself to leave her nest of blankets in bed. Images from the previous night filled her mind.

She'd stormed into his shop to yell at him for what he said the article, but when she saw his suit and hunted brown eyes she realized she couldn't stay mad at him. All these years she thought her feelings couldn't be one sided. He never frowned when he saw her coming- in fact, sometimes his lips turned upwards in a smile. His words never chilled her to the bone like other people in town experienced, but he sometimes tried to make her laugh. She hadn't even been surprised when he started kissing her back, but then he'd pulled back like she burned him and cast her out.

She supposed she deserved it. She betrayed him by letting Regina talk her into running for mayor, and now any chance at a relationship with him was over. Belle groaned, burrowing deeper under her covers. She tried closing her eyes to fall back to sleep, but she couldn't stop replaying his angry face shouting at her in her mind.

She couldn't ignore the fact that he had kissed her back, though. It was only once he saw her interview with Sidney that he accused her of tricking him. But she wasn't tricking him, and he had to know that. Why wouldn't he believe her? She may not be able to control his quick temper but she could control her own life, and laying in bed wouldn't accomplish anything.

She was out of her apartment just in time for lunch. She slid into a seat at the counter in Granny's and ordered a cheeseburger. Ruby slid the plate in front of Belle with a promise to catch up tonight. As Belle crunched on the too-crispy french fries, she noticed the tapping of a cane behind her. Her shoulders tensed.

From behind her, she heard his accented voice order his meal to go.

She twisted around in her chair to face him. "Can I speak to you in private?"

His face contorted as if he smelled sour milk. "Is this too public for you?" He hissed. "I thought you had no problem telling the entire town about me."

"We need to talk about this."

"No we don't."

"What then? Should we settle it with a duel?"

Ruby giggled at Belle's words as she handed Gold his takeout bag. He scowled. "I'm going back to my shop."

"And I'm going with you." Belle fished some money out of her bag and threw it on the counter, rushing to catch up to him.

Once the door to his shop closed behind her, he turned to look at her. Placing his lunch on the counter next to him, his fingers began drumming along the handle of his cane.

Belle took a deep breath. "I'm sorry." She said eventually. "I'm sorry I had Sidney write that article and I'm sorry I kissed you and I'm sorry I ruined our friendship. I'm not sorry for running against you, though. I wanted to run for mayor no matter who I was running against." She held her breath after that, too scared to say what she really wanted to. "But I thought you valued my friendship more than to let this come between us."

"Belle," he breathed. "I do value your friendship. I value you. You have nothing to apologize for. I shouldn't have accused you of having ulterior motives with kissing me. I'm sorry."

In all the years she'd known him, Mr. Gold had never apologized for anything. He didn't get his reputation for heartlessness by being apologetic.

"I'll accept your apology if you agree to a deal." Belle offered.

His eyebrows shot up. "Oh?"

Belle bit her lip. "If I win, you go out to dinner with me."

"And what if I win?"

>"You go out to dinner with me."<p>

He chuckled. "I will never understand you."

"Is it a deal?"

He held out his hand for her to shake, but she pushed herself forward to plant a feather-light kiss on his lips instead.

Belle won. He took her out to dinner the next day. And the day after that.

Some townspeople whispered that Belle only went on dates with him because she felt bad, or because he named it as her price for winning against him. But by some miracle, Belle's feelings towards him were genuine. He may not have won the election, but Alexander Gold ended up with the best of wives and best of women.

End
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